

The speeches and papers of my two terms as Governor are now being collected and edited for publication, and the member of my staff who is supervising this operation expressed some astonishment to me at the number of fire houses that I have dedicated since I took office in January, 1959. To me, this is a healthy sign of the tremendous interest the communities of Maryland have in improving their services of fire prevention and fire protection. It is most gratifying to me to observe that our State, certainly in the forefront among the states in the caliber of its fire services, intends to maintain the high quality of these services. As is the case with any other agency of government, fire departments must be given the tools that are required to carry out their heavy responsibilities.

Under our system of government, the operation of fire departments is primarily a responsibility of local governments. But at the higher level of State government, there is much that can be done to facilitate good fire protection and adequate fire prevention. The State of Maryland, for example, has assumed the obligation of establishing and operating an institution for the instruction of fire fighting — in the justly renowned Fire Service Extension of the University of Maryland. Another area of State responsibility is in the passage of laws to make the task of fire safety easier for those whose responsibility it is. In this connection, let me say that I was greatly pleased some weeks ago to be able to affix my signature to a bill, passed at the 1966 session of the General Assembly, to make the setting of fires to buildings other than residences a felony under our criminal statutes. As you know, heretofore that offense, even though it might result in destruction amounting to many millions of dollars in property, has been only a misdemeanor. I know how diligently this Association worked for the passage of this measure, and I was deeply pleased to have the opportunity to sign it into law. Also this year I was happy to have the opportunity to place in the budget for next year a provision for the appointment of a full-time instructor in rescue work in the Fire Service Extension of the University of Maryland. Rescue operations are an essential part of the services which are performed by the fire companies of Maryland, and this service will be greatly strengthened as a result of this added instruction at the University. In my budget also are provisions for a fire-protection engineer under our Fire Marshal and for an investigator for the area of Carroll and Eastern Frederick counties.

While speaking of the Fire Marshal's office, I would be remiss in my duties if I did not say a word in behalf of our friend, John Meyers,